



## LOUISIANA SENATE

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### **SENATOR THOMPSON REVIEWS WORK OF 2015 REGULAR SESSION**

Last week, the Louisiana Legislature adjourned its 2015 Regular Legislative Session. This year's session was a fiscal session, restricted by the state constitution to consideration of specific tax and fiscal issues with limited consideration of other legislation. Lawmakers introduced 1,132 bills, 847 in the House and 285 in the Senate. District 34 State Senator Francis Thompson (D-Delhi) says that of those many bills, some of the most important and thoroughly debated ones were those filed to tackle the seemingly insurmountable task of plugging a \$1.6 billion hole in the state's budget.

"Once again, the legislature was faced with a daunting budget deficit. With two mid-year budget cuts last year and such a large shortfall for the coming year, the need to develop a balanced budget to provide vital services to our citizens was more critical than ever," says Sen. Thompson. "Despite these challenges, I believe we were able to adopt a fair, responsible budget that provides our citizens, especially the young and the indigent, with necessary services."

Sen. Thompson says that the legislature was able to balance the budget by promoting efficiencies and reforming Louisiana's tax incentive programs for both businesses and individuals. In the end, lawmakers agreed on a \$24.4 billion budget that protects higher education and health care; fully funds TOPS; increases funding for public schools; addresses issues related to hospitals and home and community based services for the developmentally disabled; and restores some of the planned cuts to state libraries, museums, parks and the department of agriculture.

Although this year's session mostly dealt with fiscal matters, the legislature was also considered and passed a variety of other important measures including a number of bills related to transportation funding for improved roads and highways, a compromise on common core, and a package of legislation aimed at better protecting the victims of heinous crimes.

Also of import this session was the legislature's support of many measures that Sen. Thompson authored including:

- SB 182 authorizes the state Department of Public Safety and Corrections to set up protocols that cellphone carriers must follow to "ping" a customer's cellphone and get its location to the police. This measure, dubbed the "Kelsey Smith Act" in honor of a young girl whose life could have been protected with such legislation, provides law enforcement with a way to quickly ascertain the location of a wireless device if a person has been

determined to be at risk of death or serious harm due to being kidnapped or going missing.

- SB 351 authorizes the Commissioner of Agriculture to adopt rules for the regulation of unmanned aerial vehicle (UAV) systems used in the course of commercial agricultural operations within the bounds of federal regulations. It also establishes licensure and registration requirements for UAV systems used in the course of commercial agricultural operations.
- SB 184 allows schools to work directly with farmers to buy more local food and serve it to Louisiana students. This measure increases what is known as the ‘small purchase threshold.’ Increasing the threshold to the federal level simplifies the procedures currently in place for the purchasing of food by Louisiana’s schools. By allowing schools the freedom to purchase up to the federal threshold, schools may get quotes exclusively from local producers instead of issuing Request for Proposals.
- SB 263 concerns dealers with agricultural, forestry and heavy equipment sales and service facilities in Louisiana serving the state’s farmers, foresters and businesses. The bill intends to level the playing field between dealers and manufactures to ensure that their dealings are governed by principles of fairness and equity.

In addition, the legislature passed a variety of other measures of special significance to the local district at Sen. Thompson’s request:

- SB 193 creates the Walnut Street Special District in the city of Monroe as a special district for cooperative economic development between the district, the city and the owner or owners of businesses and other property within the district.
- SB 257 creates the “Tax Increment Development Corporation” which may be activated by an ordinance or resolution of the governing authority of a parish or municipality. The TID is authorized to fund a tax increment development project with ad valorem property tax increments. The measure is intended to assist the town of Richwood in bringing about economic development projects.
- SCR 115 establishes the Lake Providence Watershed council as an essential first step to form a plan for how best to restore and sustain the lake.

“Overall, I am pleased with the work we were able to accomplish this session,” said Sen. Thompson. “Despite the many challenges we faced, we were able to address a variety of important issues and improve the conditions and protect the welfare of our citizens. I look forward to continuing to work with all of my constituents to better the community and livelihood of our people.”

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